

has been some progress since then toward ending the confrontation but not enough. Therefore, after consulting with Secretary Christopher, who has literally been working around the clock with the regional leaders to resolve this problem, I have invited Prime Minister Netanyahu and Chairman Arafat to come to Washington as soon as possible. They have accepted my invitation, as has King Hussein of Jordan. I've also invited President Mubarak of Egypt; he is seeing whether it is possible for him to attend. I expect the meetings to take place early this week.

The United States has often played a pivotal role in bringing Arabs and Israelis together to work out their differences in peace. It is our responsibility to do whatever we can to protect the peace process and to help move it forward. This is such a moment.

The events of this week are all the more shocking because the Israelis and the Palestinians have taken so many giant steps toward peace in the last couple of years. They have shown the world that they want peace. They know they must make hard choices to achieve that goal.

I'm prepared to do everything in my power to help the Israelis and the Palestinians end the violence and begin the peace process again in earnest. We have to return to the path of peace along which they have already traveled so far.

Q. Mr. President, do you think that Israel is ready to abide by its promise to keep previous peace agreements made by other governments?

The President. Well, President—excuse me—Prime Minister Netanyahu says that he will abide by all previous agreements and that is

an understanding that he has reached with Chairman Arafat. We will be discussing the relevant issues here to the recent violence and what can be done to really get the peace process back on track when they come here.

Q. What do you think made them decide to come to Washington? They seem so adamantly opposed before.

The President. I believe that—I think they're both concerned about the way events spun out of control, about the loss of life, the injury, the eruption of old tensions and bitterness. And I believe they want to try to get beyond that and go back to moving toward the path of peace. I don't think they would be coming here if they didn't.

Q. What would you ask them to do?

The President. Well, I firmly believe that one of the reasons for the success we have had in the last 3 years is that the United States has not presumed to speak publicly for either one of them and we have been very careful about what we say, particularly in advance of these meetings. I'm going to do everything I can to facilitate a resolution of this, and I don't want to say anything before they get here that would complicate that.

Q. Thank you.

The President. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:50 a.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu of Israel, Chairman Yasser Arafat of the Palestinian Authority, King Hussein I of Jordan, and President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt.

Statement on House of Representatives Action on Omnibus Parks Legislation

September 29, 1996

I am pleased that the House voted last night to approve legislation that would improve our management of the national parks and other Federal lands. The bill represents a victory for all Americans who treasure and want to preserve our natural resources.

This bill includes my top priorities for parks legislation. That is, it includes provisions to im-

prove the management of the Presidio in San Francisco, help acquire the Sterling Forest in the New York/New Jersey Highlands Region, and establish the Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve in Kansas.

At the same time, the bill deletes almost all of the provisions of the earlier conference agreement that the administration had found objec-

tionable. These provisions include those that would have adversely affected the Shenandoah National Park and Richmond Battlefield National Park in Virginia, the Sequoia National Park in California, the Tongass National Forest, and other national parks and Federal lands.

To be sure, this is not a perfect bill. I continue to have concerns about certain provisions.

But on the whole, it represents a vast and good-faith improvement over the earlier conference agreement. Again, I applaud the House for approving this legislation last night, and I hope the Senate will do the same before it adjourns for the year.

Statement on Welfare Reform Initiatives

September 30, 1996

Today I am pleased to announce two important steps my administration is taking to continue our progress in making work and responsibility the law of the land.

First, today we have given the green light to the first two States to submit their State plans under the new law—Wisconsin and Michigan. Both States will receive funding under the new welfare block grant for FY 1997 as well as part of FY 1996, and will now come under all the requirements of the new welfare law, including the work requirements and the 5-year lifetime limit on welfare receipt. Both States no longer need an AFDC waiver to carry out their welfare reform plans.

I am especially pleased by this action, because as I have said before, Wisconsin's plan to replace the broken AFDC system with a system based on work is one of the boldest, most revolutionary welfare reform plans in the country. I am delighted to see it move forward. Michigan is also embarking on an innovative plan to reward and require work and demand responsibility. I congratulate both States for recognizing

what all Americans agree on: Welfare reform is first and foremost about work.

Second, tomorrow we will release the first allotment of child care funds to the States. I fought hard for the increased child care funding in the new law, because I believe that child care is essential to move people from welfare to work. Under the provisions we fought for, funding in the new child care block grant for States will increase this year from \$1.3 billion to \$1.9 billion. That means States will receive \$600 million more for child care this year than they would have received without the new law.

These steps build on the progress we have already made over the last 4 years to reform welfare and crack down on child support enforcement. Since I took office, the welfare rolls have dropped by 1.9 million; child support collections have increased by nearly 50 percent to a record \$11.8 billion; and last year's decline in the number of Americans in poverty was the largest one-year drop in 27 years. I am determined to keep working to make sure these trends continue moving in the right direction.

Statement on Signing the Department of Transportation and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 1997

September 30, 1996

Today I have signed into law H.R. 3675, the "Department of Transportation and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 1997."

The Act provides \$35.5 billion in funding for the Department of Transportation and several smaller agencies, including the National Trans-

portation Safety Board. The bill is consistent with my request in most key areas.

I am pleased that the Congress fully funded my request for the Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA) safety programs. This bill, together with the FY 1997 omnibus appropriations bill